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Parliamentarians for East Timor

Report of PET meeting with

Mr Javier Perez de Cuellar,

Secretary General of the United Nations

25 March 1991

Founder Members
Satsuki Eda MHR (Japan), Tony Lamb MHR (Australia), Lord Avebury (UK)
Secretary: Carmel Budiardjo

Report of PET meeting with the UN Secretary General

On 25 March 1991, a delegation of Parliamentarians for East Timor consisting of six Parliamentarians from Australia, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom met Dr Javier Perez de Cuellar, Secretary General of the United Nations, to discuss the question of East Timor. Mr Ahmed Rafeeuddin, UN Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, with special responsibility for East Timor, was also present.

The six Parliamentarians who met the UN Secretary General were:

Lord Avebury, UK, leader of the group
Mr Garrie Gibson, Australia
Ms Hiromi Okazaki, Japan
Mr Rob van Gijzel, Netherlands
Ms Teresa Santa Clara Gomes, Portugal
Mr Antonio de Sousa Lara, Portugal.

A Parliamentarian from Vanuatu was also to have joined the delegation but was unable to reach New York in time.

Status of East Timor question at the UN

Lord Avebury first asked the Secretary General whether, in the consultations he was undertaking in pursuance of Resolution 37/30 of 1982, he was working within the framework of the two Security Council Resolutions adopted in 1975 and 1976 and the eight General Assembly Resolutions adopted annually from 1975 to 1982. The Secretary General replied very decisively in the affirmative. He said that recognition of Portugal as the Administering Power of East Timor was a 'dogma' for the UN; he repeated this several times. He said any solution to the question of East Timor could only be reached after due consultation with the people of the territory.

The Secretary General said the question of East Timor had equal weight at the UN with the already solved question of Namibia and the question of the Western Sahara. Developments during and since the Gulf War had aroused new interest in the East Timor issue, he said; all territories in the process of de-colonisation were as important as each other.

The Secretary General said that the consultations taking place under the aegis of the UN were based not on Resolution 37/30 of 1982 but on the "good offices" of the Secretary General. This was because the Resolution had not been accepted by Indonesia. The choice was between continuing the process or bringing it to an end. The Secretary General reports annually to the General Assembly and it is for the GA to decide what steps to take.

Consulting the East Timorese

On the question of consulting the people of East Timor, the Secretary General said this would

be done in accordance with 1960 General Assembly Resolution 1514 (Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples) and 1960 Resolution 1541, but flexibility was needed from all sides to reach a solution. In his opinion, democracy means that the people must be consulted and this would have to be done.

The Secretary General said that there would indeed be a procedure which would take into account the wishes of the people of East Timor; though it might not be in the form of a referendum, it would fully comply with the terms of these resolutions of the General Assembly.

He said he found it difficult to anticipate that the Indonesians would accept a plebiscite and indicated that the UN had on previous occasions used other means of determining the will of the people. In particular, the manner by which East Timorese participated in the 1992 general elections would have a bearing on the world community's view of East Timorese feelings about being part of Indonesia. It may not be necessary to have a plebiscite if East Timorese participation was clearly one of rejection.

Reference was made to discussions with Indonesia before the Indonesian general elections in 1987. The possibility of using these elections to assess the views of the East Timorese had been considered, one idea being that low participation in the polls might be taken as a rejection of integration. Nothing had materialised from these discussions. At one point, the Assistant Secretary General spoke about the need to be 'creative' on this question.

Involving the East Timorese in the UN consultations

The Parliamentarians asked the Secretary General about bringing the East Timorese into the consultations at the UN, under Resolution 37/30, which have so far only involved Portugal and Indonesia. He said his door was open to East Timorese; the Assistant Secretary General said he had already met East Timorese, mentioning Jose Ramos Horta and Jose Luis Guterres by name.

With regard to including the East Timorese in the consultations, the Secretary General said the initiative rests exclusively with Portugal as the Administering Power. [However, before the meeting with the Secretary General, Lord Avebury received a letter from the Portuguese Ambassador in London stating: "The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 37/30 entrusted to the Secretary General a mandate to initiate consultations with all parties concerned, aiming as exploring avenues for achieving a comprehensive settlement of the question. It is therefore for him to decide which parties will be included in the consultations and also on the adequate moment to do so."]

Asked whether he would be willing to meet Xanana Gusmao, commander of the armed resistance, FALINTIL, the Secretary General expressed concern at the difficulties such a meeting might involve; he doubted the willingness of the Indonesian authorities to allow such a meeting to take place but he had no problems in having such a meeting if it were physically possible. Later in the meeting, Assistant Secretary General Ahmed Rafeeuddin also said that if it were possible to arrange a meeting with Xanana Gusmao, be would be more than willing to take part.

Portuguese Parliamentary visit to East Timor

On the planned visit of Portuguese Parliamentarians to East Timor, the Secretary General denied that the UN sees this as a means to end further consideration of East Timor at the UN. Reference

was made to a letter from the Secretary General's Office to President Suharto last June which the Indonesian press claimed had said this. The UN hopes that the parliamentary visit will help create an atmosphere conducive to further dialogue, leading to an internationally acceptable solution.

The Secretary General said that the only issue still to be resolved, before a date for the visit is fixed, is whether the Portuguese Parliamentarians would meet the Speaker of the Indonesian Parliament before or after visiting East Timor. Mr Sousa Lara told the Secretary General that members of the Convergéncia Nacionalista had just urged the Portuguese Parliament to set a time limit for the visit of July this year. The Secretary General was very glad to hear this.

Regardless of how the visit went, the United Nations would continue to pursue the question of East Timor. If the delegation was openly welcomed, had free access to East Timorese and found out a great deal about the situation, then this would exert additional pressure on Indonesia. If, however, the Indonesians restricted the Portuguese parliamentarians' access to people in East Timor and the visit was poorly handled, this would also add considerable pressure on Indonesia. Therefore, the Secretary General felt that the visit would be a very important catalyst to future activities.

Human rights and the current situation in East Timor

The Secretary General assured the Parliamentarians that he closely follows information about human rights abuses in East Timor.

Mr Garrie Gibson, who went to East Timor in February this year with a group of Australian Parliamentarians, said that East Timor still had the feel of an occupied land with some ten thousand Indonesian troops on the island, exercising strict and rigid control. He said there were constant reports of human rights abuses. The delegation had spoken to community representatives and welfare agencies who reported a number of human rights violations, arrests, harassment, beatings, torture, not allowing prisoners access to priests, and so on. He said the country was depressed economically, with very little economic development occurring. There were many health problems, very poor drainage, and poor water supply; in Dili there was no reliable water supply. Much of East Timor was infested with malarial mosquitoes as a result of the poor drainage; malaria was endemic and was not being properly treated.

He also said that the current movement for liberation of East Timor was being led by the younger generation of 18 to 22-year-olds, who have been leading most of the demonstrations that have occurred in Dili in the last 18 months. A number of young people were taking refuge in Catholic churches.

Other UN dealings with Indonesia

Asked whether the UN's dealings with Indonesia as a country involved in finding a solution to the conflict in Cambodia might conflict with its dealings with Indonesia as a country involved in the East Timor conflict, the Secretary General said these matters were in no way connected.

Press conference

Following the meeting with the Secretary General, the delegation held a press conference at the UN Press Briefing Room, sponsored by the Vanuatu Ambassador to the UN, Mr Rob van Lierop.

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Luisa,
This is an extended version of the PET report, adding some points from Carrie Gibson's report which we received after I had produced the PET Newsletter.

Carol

See p. 2 for reference to Xanana

with compliments